

VZCZCXRO6526
RR RUEHAST RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHLA RUEHMRE RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSK #0266 0861352
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 271352Z MAR 07
FM AMEMBASSY MINSK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5843
INFO RUCNOSC/ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN EUROPE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

UNCLAS MINSK 000266

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: BELARUSIAN DIESEL SPILL CAUSES LITTLE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

¶1. (U) Independent and state media on March 25 reported that on March 23, a Belarusian pipeline carrying diesel to the Latvian seaport Ventspils leaked 100 tons of fuel into the Ulla and Western Dvina rivers in Beshankovichiy (Vitebsk oblast) which was moving downstream to Latvia. By March 26, the GOB reported that the Belarusian Ministry of Emergencies and Disasters (MoED) had removed 90 percent of the spilled diesel from the rivers and was currently mitigating the environmental effects of the leak.

¶2. (SBU) A diplomat from the Latvian Embassy in Belarus on March 26 confirmed to Poloff that approximately 100 tons leaked into the rivers and was heading downstream to Latvian territory. However, according to his information, the Belarusian and Latvian authorities had mitigated most of the environmental consequences.

¶3. (SBU) On March 27, Aleksandr Rachevskiy, an official from the Belarusian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (MNREP) explained to Poloff that an unknown amount of diesel on March 23 leaked from holes and fractures along a section of pipeline owned by Russia into an irrigation canal. From there the fuel emptied into the Ulla River, then the Western Dvina 15 kilometers downstream, and by March 26 had made its way to Latvia.

¶4. (SBU) Rachevskiy claimed the GOB immediately notified the Latvian MoED and MNREP about the leak and movement of fuel slicks towards the border. The GOB also deployed MoED and MNREP teams and equipment to the affected areas to fix the leak and mitigate the environmental consequences. Other than some odor, Rachevskiy claimed the leak did not pose an environmental crisis, as the volume and swiftness of the rivers diluted the diesel into weak concentrations. The MNREP set up 19 observation stations along the Ulla and Dvina to take water samples every two hours. There have been no reports of fish and animal deaths, but the MNREP will have to dedicate resources to clean the soil along the riverbank.

¶5. (SBU) On March 27, the Latvian ambassador reiterated as much to Ambassador, praising the GOB's quick response in notifying Latvia of the accident and allowing GOL authorities to freely cross the border to assist in collecting diesel with floating booms. The Belarusian side even conducted a helicopter inspection of the affected areas and landed on Latvian territory to consult with Latvian officials. Cooperation was so good that the Latvian MFA Under Secretary during his planned visit to Minsk next week may publicly note the GOB's positive response and bilateral cooperation in an emergency situation.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Originally the independent press reported a 100,000-ton diesel leak directly into the Ulla River, but authorities were quick to point out the exaggeration. The Latvian diplomat explained that the small diameter and low pressure of the pipe made it practically impossible for more than 100 tons to leak out. Rachevskiy also estimated the leak to be relatively small but said it would take some time before an exact figure could be

determined. Fortunately the surrounding environment does not appear to be significantly harmed.

STEWART